

Report of the Board of Scientific Advisors
of the Roche Institute of Molecular Biology, May 13-15, 1982

The Board found the various constituencies of the Institute in a state of general contentment and high productivity. This theme was reiterated throughout our visit. Perhaps for this reason our attention was turned to the long term future health of the Institute - a matter that has been raised yearly for some time and was again the subject of frank discussion.

Historical Perspective

A comparison of the staff in 1972 and 1982 reveals clearly the central dilemma. The number of faculty members has been essentially constant and we are told that it will remain so. Yet the average age has increased 8 years and the percent of faculty holding tenured positions rose from 47% in 1972 to 77% in 1982. More than half of the 1972 faculty are still here in 1982 (20 of 32). The average age of the 16 full members (more than half of the scientific staff) is 52 years. There has been a loss of flexibility in the Institute over the past ten years as the number of nontenured slots decreases.

The Need for Staff Turnover

Research institutions are distinct from universities for the simple reason that there is nothing whatsoever for a faculty member to do but research. It must be conceded that research is usually conducted more energetically and perhaps even with greater hope of innovation by young scientists. It is young scientists who come through a research institution for short periods bringing new expertise and fresh ideas that help to recharge the batteries of older

scientists. This of course is why the Institute's postdoctoral fellowship program is so vital. However, even with an active fellowship program not all scientists can be expected to remain productive to the age of 70. There must be a mechanism to renew the scientific staff that ensures the future vitality of the Institute and guarantees its ability to evolve with the rapidly changing methods and ideas in modern biology. The Board believes that the Institute must reexamine its promotion and tenure policy.

One proposal gained unanimous agreement. There should be two, not one, promotions before tenure is granted, and both of these should be the occasion of a very critical scientific review. One mechanism to effect this change would be to reserve tenure for the rank of Full Member. Furthermore, we recommend that these reviews occur at five year intervals.

In addition, the Board feels that all staff members must be assessed periodically, and the Director and the department heads should allocate space and postdoctoral fellows on the basis of the performance of staff members rather than on seniority. It is preferable for a staff member to leave the Institute before his/her program becomes so weak that finding a job is difficult.

Whatever the policy changes are, we feel that it is essential to present them clearly and honestly to the staff. Signals from the Executive Committee to the staff are not always precisely emitted or received.

Independence of Junior Faculty

We applaud the decision to give scientists who will be directly associated with a senior member a different title than that of

"Assistant Member". There should be no misconception that these are different positions.

Concerns of the Faculty

There remain differences of opinion within the staff on certain critical policies that affect them such as promotion schedules, space, and postdoctoral allocation. All of these must be addressed frankly so there are no misconceptions. The issue of support for travel to international meetings was raised. It occurred to the Board that allocations were probably generous but might not appear so because of restrictions. More flexibility might be as important as more money.

The growth of the enterprise on the 5th floor is beginning to cause a certain amount of anxiety. It is imagined that vertical metastases might occur one day.

Postdoctoral Fellows

There were no burning issues this year amongst the generally happy postdoctorals. They noted that their present circumstances are improvements on their previous positions, and that is a fine complement to the Institute. Some items that they mentioned follow:

The library facility is not too convenient.

The housing administrator sends them a form before they arrive, raising their expectations but nothing really happens on their behalf. It's better to do nothing.

A central file of all job opportunities that come to any of the faculty should be available to all fellows - perhaps in the administration office.

Computer facilities are not adequate, but then we learned that the Company is installing a much better facility.

Scientific communication between floors could be improved. Perhaps all scientific meetings in the building that are open to the fellows should be listed on the calendar. An in-house series of faculty research seminars was also suggested.

More flexibility in the use of their yearly travel allocation was desired.

We mention these items for the information of the faculty without being able to judge their relative importance.

Changes in Leadership

The Board is delighted that Herb Weissbach will become the Director of the Institute upon the retirement of Sid Udenfriend in April 1983. A director who manages a mature institution has different, but no less important, challenges than a founding director. This Institute is fortunate to have had such outstanding leaders. We are also aware of the impending retirement of John Burns in 1985. His role in the founding and support of the Institute is, and has been, enormous. The Board recognizes the importance to the Institute of the position of Chief of Roche Research and stands ready to help and advise the Institute and the Administration of the Company in any way that they deem useful.

The V.D. Mattia Award

Charles Yanofsky was named the V.D. Mattia Lecturer for 1982.

Respectfully submitted,

Donald D. Brown, Chairman

Daniel Nathans

Herman Eisen

Mary Jane Osborn

Joshua Lederberg

Norman Weiner